

Message Text

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ACTION NEA-10

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 PM-05 NSC-05 SP-02 SS-15 L-03 H-02
PA-02 ACDA-12 CIAE-00 INR-10 IO-14 NSAE-00 EB-08
NRC-07 OES-07 SOE-02 DODE-00 DOE-11 CEQ-01 NEAE-00
/117 W

-----025306 171325Z /53

P R 171220Z MAR 78
FM AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI
TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 287
INFO AMCONSUL BOMBAY
AMCONSUL CALCUTTA
AMCONSUL MADRAS

UNCLAS NEW DELHI 4287

E.O. 11652: N/A
TAGS: TECH IN US
SUBJECT: PRESS COMMENT ON INDO-US NUCLEAR RELATIONS

THE MARCH 17 "TIMES OF INDIA" CARRIED THE FOLLOWING
EDITORIAL ENTITLED "STRAIGHT TALK".

BEGIN QUOTE. THE UNION GOVERNMENT HAS DONE WELL TO
SERVE NOTICE THAT IT WILL CLAIM ABSOLUTE TITLE TO THE
SPENT FUEL FROM THE TARAPUR ATOMIC POWER PLANT IF THE
US AT ANY STAGE REPUDIATES ITS AGREEMENT TO SUPPLY
ENRICHED URANIUM DURING THE LIFETIME OF THE STATION.
THIS WILL PAVE THE WAY FOR TAKING TARAPUR OUT OF THE
SAFEGUARDS SYSTEM ALTOGETHER. NEW DELHI WAS FULLY
ENTITLED TO TAKE SIMILAR ACTION IN REGARD TO THE
RAJASTHAN ATOMIC PLANT WHEN CANADA IN THE SUMMER OF
1974 UNILATERALLY STOPPED SHIPMENTS OF EQUIPMENT
AND HEAVY WATER FOR ITS SECOND UNIT FOLLOWING THE PEACEFUL
EXPLOSION AT POKHRAN. BUT AS A RESPONSIBLE POWER
DEDICATED TO THE CONTROLLED USE OF ATOMIC ENERGY FOR
PEACEFUL PURPOSES, INDIA THEN STAYED ITS HAND. FOR
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THE LAST 18 MONTHS OR SO IT HAS STOICALLY BORNE
EXCRUCIATING DELAYS AND UNCERTAINTIES IN THE INFLOW
OF ENRICHED URANIUM SUPPLIES FROM THE US. BUT
SOONER OR LATER, ITU PATIENCE IS BOUND TO GET EXHAUSTED.
ALREADY THE DEPARTMENT OF ATOMIC ENERGY HAS HAD TO CUT
THE PRODUCTION OF POWER FROM TARAPUR DUE NOT SO
MUCH TO THE PAUCITY OF FUEL AS TO THE LACK OF SUFFICIENT

STORAGE FOR DUMPING THE IRRADIATED RODS. UNDER ITS ACCORD, THE US HAS INTER ALIA THE OPTION TO BUY BACK THE SPENT FUEL FROM INDIA OR LET THIS COUNTRY REPROCESS IT UNDER SAFEGUARDS. DESPITE PROLONGED NEGOTIATIONS, THE CARTER ADMINISTRATION HAS VIRTUALLY RULED OUT EITHER COURSE. THE US HAD EARLIER AGREED TO INDIA BUILDING A FAIRLY EXPENSIVE FACILITY AT TARAPUR FOR REPROCESSING. THANKS TO THE DRASTIC CHANGE IN AMERICAN NUCLEAR POLICY BROUGHT ABOUT BY PRESIDENT CARTER, INDIA CANNOT FULLY USE ITS REPROCESSING PLANT AT TARAPUR IN THE FORESEEABLE FUTURE. TRUE, WASHINGTON HAS GIVEN TO THE DAE FREE OF CHARGE DESIGNS AND DRAWINGS FOR THE MODIFICATION OF ITS STORAGE DUMPS FOR SPENT FUEL AT TARAPUR SO AS TO INCREASE THEIR CAPACITY. APART FROM BEING ONLY A TEMPORARY PALLIATIVE, HOWEVER, SUCH CHANGES WILL COST A LOT OF MONEY AND IT IS BY NO MEANS CERTAIN THAT THEY CAN BE CARRIED OUT IN GOOD TIME.

IT IS TO BE HOPED THAT THE PRIME MINISTER, MR. MORARJI DESAI, WILL BE ABLE TO PERSUADE WASHINGTON TO FULFILL ITS CONTRACTUAL OBLIGATIONS TO INDIA DURING HIS FORTHCOMING VISIT TO THE USA., IF NOT EARLIER. THE USA HAS SUPPLIED TARAPUR-TYPE PLANTS TO SEVERAL COUNTRIES SOME OF WHICH, LIKE INDIA, ARE STILL STEADFAST IN THEIR VIEW THAT THEY CANNOT POSSIBLY

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ACCEPT FULLSCOPE SAFEGUARDS SO LONG AS THE PROPOSALS MOOTED IN THIS REGARD REMAIN BRAZENLY DISCRIMINATORY IN FAVOR OF THE NUCLEAR-WEAPON STATES. WHAT IS MORE, RESISTANCE TO THE NEW US STANCE ON REPROCESSING IS MOUNTING EVEN AMONG AMERICA'S OWN ALLIES IN EUROPE AND ELSEWHERE. IT IS POSSIBLE THAT PRESIDENT CARTER MAY NOW SEE THE WRITING ON THE WALL AND CHANGE COURSE. IN ANY CASE, INDIA CANNOT WRITE OFF ITS HEAVY INVESTMENTS IN ATOMIC REACTORS AND THE REPROCESSING PLANT AT TARAPUR BY SWITCHING OVER TO COAL, AS SOME SUGGEST, TO RUN THE TURBINES AND THE GENERATORS INSTALLED THERE. IT WILL NO DOUBT BE DIFFICULT FOR THE DAE TO DEVELOP A MIXED PLUTONIUM-NATURAL URANIUM FUEL FOR THE REACTORS OR ENRICH URANIUM FOR THE PURPOSE ON ITS OWN. BUT WHATEVER THE ODDS, BOTH THESE ALTERNATIVES SHOULD BE VIGOROUSLY EXPLORED. END QUOTE.

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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: X
Capture Date: 01 jan 1994
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: PRESS COMMENTS, INTERGOVERNMENTAL COOPERATION, NUCLEAR FUELS
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Draft Date: 17 mar 1978
Decaption Date: 01 jan 1960
Decaption Note:
Disposition Action: n/a
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment:
Disposition Date: 01 jan 1960
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1978NEWDE04287
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: N/A
Errors: N/A
Expiration:
Film Number: D780119-0294
Format: TEL
From: NEW DELHI
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1978/newtext/t19780355/aaaabytg.tel
Line Count: 111
Litigation Code IDs:
Litigation Codes:
Litigation History:
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM
Message ID: 148c17c5-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Office: ACTION NEA
Original Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Original Handling Restrictions: n/a
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 3
Previous Channel Indicators: n/a
Previous Classification: n/a
Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Reference: n/a
Retention: 0
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 29 mar 2005
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review Media Identifier:
Review Release Date: N/A
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
SAS ID: 3291245
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: PRESS COMMENT ON INDO-US NUCLEAR RELATIONS THE MARCH 17 "TIMES OF INDIA" CARRIED THE FOLLOWING EDITORIAL ENTITLED "STRAIGHT TALK".
TAGS: TECH, IN, US
To: STATE
Type: TE
vdkgvkey: odb://SAS/SAS.dbo.SAS_Docs/148c17c5-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Review Markings:
Sheryl P. Walter
Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
20 Mar 2014
Markings: Sheryl P. Walter Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 20 Mar 2014